

## String That Ties To You by larshoneytoasted

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, i love steve but this is strictly jonathan/nancy, i love you jonathan byers: a novel by nancy wheeler, otp: i don't want to be alone, post season 1 around late february to mid-march of 1984, tagging underage b/c they're 16 and who knows how the last chapter is going to pan out lol, well all knew i'd be utter trash for jancy lmao

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**Characters:** Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, mentions of Mike and the boys and of course Barb

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

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**Summary:**

"I am already in another world - or between two worlds, one dead, the other dying to be born." - S.P. / Nancy needs Jonathan now more than ever - ; (a three-part jancy fic filled with angst and unrequited love.)

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

disclaimer: i don't own 'stranger things', all characters belong to the duffer brothers & netflix.

ps. i actually ship jonathan/nancy/steve but we all know that jancy is life. plus i imagine both nancy and jonathan suffer from ptsd after what happened and they truly know how to heal the other because they're going through their own shit.

Pt. I

*“Suddenly I wonder,  
‘Where is the girl that I was last year?  
Two years ago? What would  
she think of me now?’”*

– Sylvia Plath

She keeps the door open a crack now, found her old nightlight she had stashed away and plugged it into the outlet nearest her bed. She even checked her closet before bed, just in case. She was sixteen and afraid of the dark.

Nancy Wheeler was paranoid.

Every misstep made her jump and a surprise “tap” on the shoulder was now a threat. She was never much of a flincher, but now any sudden move made her neck snap. At least, she thought, her reflexes were good.

Yet her kisses had become chaste, her hand stiff and cold in his, and Steve was worried that Nancy didn’t like him anymore. Her smiles weren’t genuine anymore, her eyes had lost that warm *glow* that kindled a fire in his heart every time he looked into them. She

wasn't *his* Nancy anymore; he didn't know *who* she was at all.

"I think we should break up," Steve says coolly, wrist resting on the steering wheel of his car, eyes set on Nancy sitting in the passenger seat. She stares at him blankly, parts her lips as if to speak, but shuts them and nods instead.

"I understand."

Steve manages to place his lips against Nancy's sallow cheek before she slips out his car and disappears into her house, watching her window glow as she turns on the lamps one by one, the one illuminating window sticking out against the dark house. He hopes that this is the right thing to do, because *god damn* does it hurt to let her go.

*If you love her, set her free.*

He shifts his car into drive and heads home, lips sealed shut even as his favorite song breaks the airwaves and fills the stale air inside.

Nancy leaves her bedroom door open a sliver, her silhouette faint against her poster plastered wall, shadow outlined by the soft white nightlight shining bright next to her bed. She turns on a few lamps to cast out the darkness and slowly undresses, eyes on her shadowed figure cast against the curtain at her window. Steve would never come through that window again – he was done with her. Nancy knew she should be mad that he didn't explain *why* he wanted to break up – he didn't even try to pull some lame bullshit like "it's not you, it's me" or even bitch about her weird behavior – but there was no violent fire in her gut for him, no sadness weighing down her heart.

She just felt numb.

Slipping into a pair of pajamas, Nancy climbs into bed and curls up into herself, eyes wide open and focused on the light bulb burning in the lamp at her bedside table. Her eyes begin to water and she blinks rapidly, focusing her attention to her window, at the soft glow the moon throws at the sheer fabric of the curtain, illuminating a small patch of carpet at the foot of her bed.

*Where Jonathan once slept.*

That is, until she called him up to lay beside her, to lay awkwardly above the comforter while she was tucked underneath, their breathing contrasting until suddenly they were inhaling and exhaling at the same time. Nancy was awake the whole time while Jonathan dozed off, giving her a moment to *actually* study him.

When she was sure he was sleeping, Nancy turned on her side and *really* looked at Jonathan – the soft bump down the length of his nose, his incredibly long lashes, how full his bottom lip was, the dimple on his chin – and it was hard not to touch him, simply run her finger across his flush cheek and feel his cheekbone against the pad of her thumb. Even as he slept Jonathan looked worried, his sharp eyebrows permanently furrowed, but lying next to her, Nancy thought he looked incredibly *peaceful*.

*Even kinda cute.*

She was glad he was sleeping, the blush on her cheeks furious, one he would definitely notice. She found herself just staring at Jonathan when they were together – in the dark room, at the cemetery, sitting side by side at the police station as she iced his bruised skull – and it was foolish to deny that her heart would *flutter* when their eyes met, breath caught in their throats as they came to the same, grizzly realizations involving the whereabouts of their loved ones.

It was if he completed her, was healing the hole in her heart that still stung with the loss of Barb.

No one could ever *replace* Barb, but it was nice to have someone *get* it. Steve tried – she couldn't say he didn't – but he just didn't understand it fully. He wasn't *there* – he wasn't the one that she screamed for, who she clung to so fiercely she was sure she had bruised his ribs.

She wanted *Jonathan*.

She stretches her arm out across the space where Jonathan had slept, hand splayed out over the blanket his body rested on, and presses her palm into the comforter, closing her eyes and desperately imagining

Jonathan lying next to her again, their chests rising and falling in tandem, sleeping soundly knowing that they were *safe* because they were *together*.

It's crazy how she's thinking like this, how she's *feeling* this way about *Jonathan Byers*. If you had asked her a year ago – two or three, hell even *ten* – if she would ever think of Jonathan Byers romantically, she'd politely say “no” and explain that she was only familiar with him because of their brothers. They were nothing more than friendly strangers – *acquaintances* – that smiled and said “hello” when prompted.

Now Nancy wished more than anything that he was lying beside her right now, holding her, keeping her safe from the monsters that preyed on her in the dark.

-end pt. i-

## 2. Chapter 2

### Summary for the Chapter:

nancy exposes herself in the dark room.

### Notes for the Chapter:

this part is a lot longer than the first because wow awkward sexual tension is so much fun to write. final chapter will me a jancy snuggle fest (+ more?????) so buckle up. also jonathan has a crush on steve no matter what he says, lbr.

Pt. II

*"I saw the great void  
in your soul, and  
you saw mine."*

- Sebastian Faulks

Nancy doesn't sleep, at least, she *dreamt* that she didn't sleep. All night she tossed and turned, the creature vivid and alive behind her closed eyelids, and suddenly the sun rose pink and gold through the thin fabric of her curtain, and she rolled out from the tight little ball on her bed and stretched her sore muscles, rubbing her heavy eyes and cracking the bones in her wrists before she got ready for school.

She walks sluggishly through Hawkins, squinting as the fluorescent lights bore down on her, and shuffles towards her locker, exchanging books and looking forlornly at the polaroids of her and Barb taped to the inside of her locker door.

Her morning passed by in a blur and before she knew it, the bell rang for lunch. Nancy usually sat with Steve and sometimes Jonathan would join them too, but recently he's been spending his lunch hour

in the dark room, working on a project for the upcoming spring art show. Nancy loved riffling through Jonathan's photos, getting lost in each snap, feeling like she was *actually* there. Jonathan just had a way of capturing people.

*Of capturing her.*

She skids right past the doors to the lunchroom, not even bothering to see if Steve was there (he wasn't) and heads straight for the art room down in the basement of the school. Her stomach is hollow and her footsteps are heavy as she makes her way to the dark room, Jonathan the only student inside occupying the already small space. He jumps, startled when Nancy breaks the thick velvet curtain, but immediately softens when he realizes that it's her.

"Oh, hey Nancy," he says, a grin tugging at the corner of his mouth, dimple pressed into his cheek.

"Hey," she greets, placing her books on an end table littered with broken filmstrips, slipping her bag off her shoulder. She takes a seat on one of the large stools standing idly in a corner and drags herself over to where Jonathan stands, working on some new prints for his project, and she leans over his shoulder just enough to take a look.

"They look great, Jonathan," she says softly, chin resting on his shoulder blade. Jonathan chuckles and runs his fingers over the edges of his photos. They're all shot in black and white, various images ranging from portraits of his mother sitting in her favorite plush armchair, Will beaming on his bike as he races down the street, Hopper smoking a cigarette on the back porch of his trailer looking out over the still lake...

Nancy at her desk, her tongue poking out between her lips in concentration, one hand balled into a fist where her temple rests against her knuckles, the other holding a pencil poised over her notebook, her small, cramped handwriting taking up most of the ruled paper.

She flushes in the darkness and inhales sharply, catching a whiff of soap and ink on the skin on Jonathan's neck. How was it that he was always taking pictures of her without her knowledge? How did he

manage to stay so *silent*?

“They’re okay, I can do better,” Jonathan mumbles, picking up the photo of Will and staring down at it with kindness in his eyes. Nancy rests her head on his shoulder and touches his arm thoughtfully.

“They’re better than ‘okay’. They’re *amazing*. You need to stop selling yourself short,” she insists, lifting her head from his shoulder and looking at his fuzzy, red outline in the darkness beside her. It’s funny how even in the dark she can still see Jonathan blush.

“I just hope they’re good enough to get me that scholarship,” Jonathan says, studying his photographs splayed out before them and hanging on the line overhead. Nancy knew how important this art show was – there would be scouts from some of the best art schools in the country looking for perspective talent – and Jonathan was *truly* obsessing about making sure his portfolio was nothing less than *perfect* for the scouts coming in from NYU, his dream school. She squeezes his arm reassuringly, her lips close to the shell of his ear as she encourages him.

“You *will*, Jonathan. I *know* it.”

Sometimes all you need is for someone to believe in you – that’s what Jonathan had learned from Nancy as they grew closer in the months since they had set fire to an extraterrestrial creature in the hallway of his home. With her support, Jonathan felt more and more confident in his photos – he was even a little more social, joining Nancy and Steve at the diner for a burger on a Friday night, huddled in the corner of the couch as the three of them watched old Christmas classics on the big TV in Steve’s living room over winter break.

He was finally coming out of his shell, thanks to Nancy.

She helped keep the demons at bay, made the negative thoughts that screamed in his head sound irrational, and made him feel so much *warmer* with her presence. It was nice to have a friend that wasn’t your kid brother – Will was an amazing little brother and Jonathan honestly considered him his best friend, but there were some things he just couldn’t burden his brother with. *He* was supposed to be the strong one, the father figure that Lonnie failed to be. He was his



mother's rock, his brother's protector – he couldn't confess to him how lonely he felt in a crowded room, how worried he was that Will was going to disappear again, how afraid he was that Nancy would be taken from him next...

With her lips so close to his cheek, he was sure if he turned to face her that they would be nose-to-nose, lips inches apart, breath mingling, and a shiver runs down his spine, his breath hitching in his throat before he clears it and runs trembling fingers over the glossy snapshots of his loved ones.

"Thanks, Nance," he whispers, heart pounding in his chest, the feel of her hand wrapped around his bicep burning through the fabric of his shirt and into his skin. He wonders if she knows what she's doing – *She has to*, he thinks, *How can she not know how she makes me feel?* – if she's teasing him because she knows that he likes her, knows that he can't have her because she's with *Steve*. It's not too big of a deal – of *course* Nancy would chose Steve over him, why wouldn't she? He was good looking and charismatic, even if he could be a class-a douchebag sometimes. But he had redeemed himself, tried his hardest to be a *nice guy*, tried *very hard* to be Jonathan's friend – *For Nancy's sake*, he'd remind himself, not because he actually *wanted* to be friends with him. They had no similar interests other than liking the same girl.

With her lips are so close to his skin, she can practically *taste* it on the tip of her tongue. She feels lightheaded being so close to him – since when was she swooning over *Jonathan?* – and she wants desperately to press herself into him fully, to feel his body mold into hers and completely melt into him, curl herself up inside of him and sit cuddled up inside his ribcage and fall asleep next to his pumping heart.

There's a bravery inside Nancy that she never knew she had before – one that awakened deep inside her the night she slipped into that pulsating tree, stepped into the Upside Down and saw the creature that had taken Barb with her own two eyes – and being so close to Jonathan in the dark room woke the sleeping lioness curled over her heart that demanded *more* from him, from *her*.

"Nancy?" Jonathan has to break the silence – he can't bare to feel her

soft breath tickle his earlobe anymore, and he dares to turn his head and face her, and sure enough they're nose-to-nose, lips inches apart, breath mingling...

"Yeah?"

She wants this, she wants to kiss him, for *him* to kiss *her*. She knows that he feels... *whatever this is* between them, and she can't stand how they kept getting interrupted just before Jonathan was close to telling her what she knew all along. They were *alone* and there was nothing that could stop him now...

"Umm... where's Steve? Didn't you eat lunch with him?"

*Stupid, stupid, STUPID!*

Nancy pulls back immediately, eyebrows furrowed, nose wrinkled, and she gives Jonathan a curious look. Why was she asking about *Steve*?

"What? N – No, I didn't. We kinda, um, we kinda broke up last night," she mumbles, hanging her head and placing her hands in her lap. Jonathan's knees buckle and he presses his palms into the table to steady himself.

*Did he dump her? No way, there's no way he would dump Nancy. She must have dumped him. But...*

"Why?" he questions, his voice breaking with the question. Nancy keeps her eyes on her laced fingers, embarrassed to look Jonathan in the eyes as she tells him that she got *dumped*. She grimaces and rolls her eyes, crossing her thin arms across her chest in agitation.

"I wish I knew," she mutters, a touch of malice in her voice. "But I also don't care. Not as much as I thought I would." She lifts her head and frowns at him. Her heart feels so heavy, so beaten up and sore – she just wants so badly for the good things to happen, but everything was falling apart.

"I'm, I'm sorry, Nancy. That's awful. I know you really liked him," Jonathan is being sincere. He doesn't want to see Nancy hurt – especially not because of Steve – but he can't help but be a little

happy that she wasn't with him anymore. The big question was, was she *over* him?

"I know I should be upset – *heartbroken* – but I'm... I'm *not*, Jonathan," her voice wavers, her hands shake, and it takes everything in her to not *cry*. But it's too late – traitor tears drip down her cheeks and a huge sob manages its way out of her throat. "I don't feel *anything* – I can't *feel* anything anymore. Not since... not since that *thing*... and *Barb*... I just... I just...." Nancy hides her wet face in her hands, salty tears thick on her tongue, and she feels so *ashamed* of herself for crying in front of Jonathan.

"Nancy don't – don't cry," Jonathan stutters, his anxiety grabbing hold of him as Nancy crumbles at his feet, unsure of what to do, how to *comfort* her properly. But he doesn't have to make the move to do so because Nancy falls into his chest, wrapping her arms tightly around his middle, knocking the wind from his lungs. She buries her face into the t-shirt clinging to his chest, her nose smushed against his sternum, cheek pressed into his breast plate as tears roll down her cheeks and leave quarter-sized stains on his shirt.

Jonathan wraps his arms around Nancy, supporting her trembling body as she cries. His cheeks are burning and his heart is racing and he's sure that Nancy can feel it knocking against the flesh of her cheek, and as he holds her tighter – brings her *closer* to him – he wishes desperately that he could keep her this close all the time. At least then he would be able to keep her from falling.

"I'm s-so t-tired, Jonathan. I haven't s-slept in days. I can't c-concentrate on m-my schoolwork and m-my grades are *dropping* and I *can't* h-handle this on my own anymore. I'm so exhausted," Nancy stutters, hands curling into the shirt on his back. Her ribs are aching as she presses herself into him, as her lungs expand and deflate violently as she sobs so fiercely. She hadn't let go like this in *such* a long time – she had finally cracked. She was just lucky that Jonathan was *here*, holding her together as she collapsed like a small, pathetic, dying star.

Jonathan lets Nancy cry into his chest, sniffing and coughing and sneezing into his shirt, apologizing pitifully after each new stain she leaves on the front of his shirt. He couldn't care less about the shirt –

he cared about Nancy, and if she needed a shoulder – or a *body* – to cry on, he was there to lend it, just like she was there for him when got down on himself.

*That's just what friends do for each other.*

Their instantaneous bond that blossomed over night – the sudden comfort and familiarity they found in each other, a natural *pull* that drew them together in the *strangest* of ways – has to mean *something*.

Finally Nancy begins to calm down, wiping her eyes on the last dry spot on Jonathan's shirt, and loosens her hold around him, but she doesn't let him go completely. She lays her hands on Jonathan's chest, palms resting on the wet fabric that was all her doing, and looks up at him through wet, puffy red eyes.

"Thank you... for being my human snot rag," she mumbles, a small smile playing on her lips. Jonathan chuckles softly and places his hands delicately at her waist, his thumb resting in the gentle curves at her sides.

"Don't mention it," he says. "I'm happy to have been some comfort." Nancy snuffles and a genuine smile crosses her face, one that makes Jonathan's heart skip a beat. She rubs her palm across his chest and pushes gently, shaking her head.

"You have no idea," she breathes, her tone teasing but meaning it deeply. She finally steps away from him, breaking the closeness between them, and takes a deep breath, wiping her eyes with the pad of her thumb and straightening her blouse. She'll have to stop in the girls' bathroom to wash her face before going to class. The last thing she needs is for the entire senior class to see her post-cry.

"Well, I gotta head out. I think I better clean up before Trig," Nancy says, throwing her bag over her shoulder and gathering her books in her arms. Jonathan leans against the table littered with his photos and clears his throat.

"Yeah, yeah I need to develop a couple more prints before class," he says, scratching the back of his head. "I'll guess I'll see you around school tomorrow." He shifts his gaze from Nancy and her

schoolbooks to his collection of pictures and grabs the last roll of film sitting next to his camera. He'd probably end up late to English, but who cared when his future at NYU was on the line?

"Y-Yeah, I guess I'll see you tomorrow..." Nancy bites her lower lip and hovers in front of the curtain separating the dark room from the art studio, staring at Jonathan as he begins to unroll the thin strip of film. Tomorrow seemed so far away – one more sleepless night before seeing him again – and she decides to voice her wants (her *needs*) because there was no point in hiding it anymore.

She was completely exposed.

"Jonathan, will you come over tonight?" She says it in a rush, letting the words spill from her mouth before her courage left her, and her cheeks burn with embarrassment as she stares at her shoes. He drops the film and it falls with a clatter on top of the table, Jonathan scrambling to pick it up as he tried to process the question fully in his mind. He hadn't stayed over at Nancy's house since the fall...

"Uh... yeah, yeah sure. I'll come over tonight, no problem," he says, flashing her a dorky grin. Nancy's heart leaps.

"Okay. Um, just come to my window at like, 8 o'clock then?" Her hand is on the curtain, ready to dart out before he changes his mind, but she knows he won't – he *wouldn't*. Jonathan nods and holds his hand up, waving her off.

"See you later," he says, and she slips behind the curtain, holding her books tight to her chest, a huge smile plastered over her mouth as she makes a mad dash to the girls' bathroom, leaving Jonathan to look over his photos of Nancy in his pile of portraits, too preoccupied to develop film, too lost in what could be.

-end pt.ii-

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Summary for the Chapter:

nancy and jonathan sleep together.

#### Notes for the Chapter:

first of all, thank you guys so, so, SO much for being patient with me. it was NOT supposed to take me this long to write and post the ending to this fic. life, however, got the best of me and i've finally finished my first 'stranger things' ficlet! thank you guys so much for the kudos and comments - it really pushed me to get this chapter done and done right. i didn't just want to throw shit together and call it a day, so i really hope that you guys enjoy the ending. i WILL write more 'stranger things' fics; hopefully more jancy, hopefully some jonanve, and i'd love to dabble with some stories involving eleven and the boys. of course, i'm not shy with writing m-rated material, so maybe the next jancy fic will involve a little more under-the-clothes fun. ;) enjoy, and thank you, from the bottom of my cold dark heart.

Pt. III

*“But we were never  
lonely and never afraid  
when we were together.”*

- Ernest Hemingway

Her cheek rests against her open textbook, breath tickling a long, calculated paragraph on the Lewis structure, “The Edge of Seventeen” spinning softly in the background as Nancy sleeps on her homework, waiting for Jonathan to arrive at her bedroom window. Her dreams creep at the edge of her subconscious, dark masses reaching for her

in the nether, and her whole body begins to twitch, hands balling into fists, chest tightening as her heart beats rapidly with fear...

"Nancy?" his voice is soft, muffled by the glass and music, but it's enough to wake her, eyes fluttering open, arms jerking, sending her Chemistry text to the floor with a loud *thunk*.

"Shit, Jonathan," she mumbles, scrambling to her feet and rushing towards the window, twisting the locks and lifting the window open for Jonathan to climb through. His mess of brown hair is damp from the soft, wet snowfall drifting from the night sky, scattered on the denim jacket draped over his boney shoulders. He immediately slips off his boots and tucks them in a corner of a room, a courtesy, he said, he learned from his mother, and shoves his hands in the pocket of his coat.

"Hey, Nance," he smiles, his lashes sparkling with snow. Nancy's eyes flutter and her cheeks glow from the bitter wind that snuck its way inside her warm room and, of course, Jonathan's smile. She never thought she'd get so *jittery* around Jonathan Byers – she remembered when once upon a time she felt this way about *Steve*.

*Yesterday seems like such a distant memory...*

Nancy shakes herself from her ogling as Jonathan scans her room awkwardly, waiting for her to say something, and she tugs at his damp sleeve.

"Well take off your coat, silly. Stay a while."

Her voice makes his frozen bones melt, her warm fingertips grazing his knuckles as she pulls at his jacket, and he manages to slip the garment from his trembling frame and rest it on the bay window he came in from. His long arms lay limp by his sides as he stands in front of Nancy in her bedroom after hours for the *second* time in his life. He wasn't really accustomed to being in girls' rooms *at all*. Nancy, of course, was the one exception.

Nancy tucks a strand of long hair behind her ear and darts for her Chemistry book lying haphazardly on the ground, organizing her disaster zone of a desk from her impromptu nap. Jonathan meanders

towards her desk and smiles as she sweeps together papers and straightens her pencils.

“Chem makes me fall asleep too,” he jokes, noting the neatly printed chemical equations scrawled across the college ruled lines in her notebook. Nancy snorts and rolls her eyes.

“Yeah, because it’s so *easy* for you, freakin’ chemistry *whiz*.” Jonathan can’t help the blush that spreads across the apple’s of his cheeks, burying his hands into the pockets of his jeans, darting his gaze from Nancy’s teasing grin to her school notes.

“You messed up this structure – you’re missing an ion on sulfur...” Jonathan swipes the pencil sitting idly on the desk and draws a thick lead circle around Nancy’s perfectly written “S”. Nancy blushes as he corrects her notes, rolling her eyes and pursing her lips in mock irritation, playfully shoving his shoulder as he drops the pencil when he’s finished.

“I didn’t ask you over to knit-pick at my Chem notes,” she says, heading over to her record player and pulling the needle from the rotating vinyl. Jonathan can’t help the crack in his voice as he speaks.

“Oh, that’s right – you want me to *sleep* with you.” It’s supposed to be a *joke* – no sexual innuendo intended – but there’s more *truth* in his jab than Nancy would like to admit, at least not to Jonathan. She fidgets with the hem of her top, cornflower blue cotton adorned with white daisies, and bites her lower lip, a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth.

“Oh shut up, Jonathan,” she gushes, crawling into her bed and grabbing a pillow to hug to her chest. Jonathan chuckles and stands at the end of the bed, hands wrapping around the metal posts that adorn the bedframe, heart thumping against his ribs as he admires the glow in Nancy’s cheeks that *he* caused. He had no idea he was capable of making a girl blush, especially Nancy Wheeler.

“I don’t mind,” he confesses, climbing over the bedpost. Nancy shifts back against the pillows, and then they’re sitting comfortably across from each other, feet tucked underneath their thighs on top of the old



patchwork quilt spread across her bed. Nancy picks at the corner of the pillowcase as Jonathan sits with his hands in his lap, the gentle sound of their breathing the only noise in the room.

“Are you okay?”

Nancy jumps when Jonathan breaks the silence, gripping the pillowcase tightly in her fist. She takes a deep breath through her nostrils before shaking her head, eyes focused on her straining knuckles.

“I was starting to have a nightmare before you woke me up,” she says, swallowing a wet lump in her throat. Jonathan frowns, fingers twitching, wanting to *reach out* but not knowing if he should, if he *could*...

*You're on her bed, dammit, you can hold her hand.*

He gingerly takes her hand in his and without missing a beat, Nancy laces their fingers together. Jonathan's breath hitches in his throat as her thumb begins to run the length of his index finger, heart hammering, stomach flipping. He mimics her, thumb lightly stroking against her own, and for a moment they sit there in silence, sitting quietly across from each other, Nancy inhaling deeply to try and quell the nerves quaking within her.

“They come every night,” she whispers, eyes locked on their intertwined fingers. “I can't shake them. It's like a sickness.” Jonathan nods his head solemnly.

“I get them, too. Sometimes they're so violent, I wake up screaming,” he confesses. He can feel the scar etched on his left palm tingling – a reminder of who he was, of what he could do, of what was *out there* – as it presses into Nancy's unblemished one, its twin hidden in a fist by her pillow, and it feels so *good* to share his nightmares with someone that *gets it*, with someone who shares the same *demons*. He'd never tell Will about his dreams – the poor boy had his own, filled with hideous creatures, pulsating pods with thick vines that tickled his mouth and begged to slip down his throat – and it was hard to share them with Nancy when she had her own, but at least he didn't have to pretend to be strong for her.

To her, he already was.

Nancy looks at Jonathan through her lashes, her chest warm yet *tight* as Jonathan gently strokes her hand. It was like a big balloon was swelling inside of her, expanding against her ribcage, ready to *pop* with unrequited desires. Her fist gripping the pillowcase relaxes, unfurling it to reveal the delicate pink scar slashed across it, her life line and love line split in two. Sometimes she'd study it and wonder if it meant anything – if by marrying her body to tempt a beast had completely changed the course of her life – and then she remembered that Jonathan had a matching one, and she wondered (*hoped*, even) that it meant he'd end up following her down that path, right by her side.

"It's not so bad," she says, "when I'm with you."

Jonathan stops caressing her hand, his heart jolting, the hairs on the back of his neck rising as her words *truly* sunk into his brain. Did those affectionate touches mean *more* than just two friends goofing around? Was she seeing him in a different light now that they had *actually* been to hell and back, having survived it because they had become a *team*?

*Two halves of a whole.*

"Nancy?" his voice is low, heart knocking *violently* and *painfully* against his ribs, and he swallows a dry lump in his throat before looking at her, meeting her glassy-eyed gaze. "Are you... still upset about Steve?" Nancy shakes her head solemnly, wishing she *was* mourning her romantic relationship with Steve. She *had* loved him, she still *did* – but the love had changed, morphed into something softer, lighter, *friendlier* – but he felt *deeper*, and it wasn't fair to pretend anymore. It wasn't fair to *Steve*.

*If you love him, set him free.*

"I love Steve, but I'm not *in love* with Steve," she states. "What happened last fall... that *changed* me, Jonathan. I'm not that girl anymore – I'm not *Steve's* girl." Her voice cracks and she flexes her fingers laced with Jonathan's, and he does the same, sweaty hands breaking for air and coming back together, cool and warm with

anticipation, fingers tingling with *hope*.

His eyes are suddenly fixed on her mouth – plum and full and *coming closer?* – and there’s nothing stopping him now, no one to interrupt him from finally making his move.

“Nance...” his voice is barely above a whisper, their faces drawing closer.

“Yeah?”

*Do it, Byers. Do it, Byers. DO IT, BYERS.*

*Kiss me. Kiss me. **Please** just kiss me.*

They kiss.

Jonathan raises his trembling free hand to cradle Nancy’s tilted face, smooth palm against her smooth cheek, and after a few beats he pulls away slowly, the soft *pop* of their lips parting echoing in their ears. Jonathan’s whole face is glowing red and the apples of Nancy’s cheeks are pink, and soft smiles spread across both of their wet mouths. Jonathan drops his hand and places it on his knee, drumming his fingers anxiously against the cap. Nancy sighs and grabs the collar of his shirt, pulling him towards her and crushing her mouth against his. His eyes are wide open – *surprised* at how *bold* Nancy was – and gasps as her tongue manages to slip through his lips. When she breaks the kiss, Jonathan’s face is burning with embarrassment.

“Wow...” he murmurs, shaky fingers ghosting over his swollen lips. Nancy blushes, biting her full bottom lip, the taste of his kiss warm and sweet on her tongue. His kiss was nothing like Steve’s – rough and needy and sloppy – and she was *hungry* for more. This time she takes hold of his hands as she pulls him forward, Jonathan ready to be kissed, ready to kiss *her*. She wraps her arms around his neck and holds him flush against her, bringing him down to hover over as her head falls against the pillows, dark curls splayed out around her like a halo.

Jonathan positions his knee between her legs, holding himself steady

by his forearms as Nancy plays with the hair at the nape of his neck, her fingers brushing against the skin, goosebumps rising on every inch of his flesh. Gingerly, he places his hand in the curve at her side, the heat of her warm skin hidden beneath her flowery printed pjs tickling his palm, and Nancy mewls into his mouth at the contact, raising her hips to bump against his groin. Jonathan groans, breaking their fervent kiss and presses his forehead against hers, closing his eyes, trying to *focus* on the here and now, the reality of the situation (*I'm making out with Nancy Wheeler...*), as his mind begins to spin.

"Are you okay?" Nancy whispers, her chest rising and falling rapidly, dark eyes scanning Jonathan's face for distress. "Do you want to stop?" Immediately Jonathan snaps his attention back to Nancy lying beneath him, wide eyes shining as they study his face, and he palms her warm cheek and presses his wet lips against hers, kissing her so deeply a *squeak* escapes the back of her throat. She feels woozy and light-headed as Jonathan's tongue dances with hers, his notoriously *quiet* lips surprisingly *gifted* when it came to kissing, and her hands slip underneath the hem of his shirt, fingertips sliding up his abdomen before pressing her palms flat on his bare chest.

"Ah shit, Nance," he hisses, hiding his face in the crook of her neck, planting his lips on the swollen carotid artery pulsating at her throat. Nancy sighs and slides her hands up to his shoulders and wraps her arms around his neck, pulling him down to lay on top of her chest.

"Mmm, don't stop doing that," Nancy purrs, straining her neck and giving Jonathan full access to assault her warm skin. But Jonathan stops, even though he can't get *enough* of Nancy's little mewls and sighs as he kissed and touched her, only to tug his shirt off and throw it on the bedroom floor. Nancy looks at him through half-lidded eyes, running them up and down his exposed chest, drinking him up and embedding his image into her memory forever. She raises her head to kiss him tenderly, hands falling from behind his neck and down to the collar of her shirt, hastily undoing the tiny buttons restraining her from being even *closer* to the boy on top of her.

But Jonathan stops her frantic hands, wrapping his long fingers around her wrist, and kisses her forehead, Nancy's mouth turning down in a confused frown.

“Do you – not want to?” she asks, voice rising. Jonathan swallows and casts his gaze down to Nancy’s chest, the buttons that had been undone revealing just the *shadow* of her breasts, and the apples of his cheeks *burn*, shifting his hips so his growing arousal against her thigh wouldn’t creep her out. Nancy *does* notice, of course, and bites her tongue to keep from laughing, not to be *mean*, but because she was *ticked* that *she* was the one that made him that way.

“I – I *do*, trust me, *I do* – but I’m just, ya know,” he looks at her shyly through his thick lashes, never having been embarrassed about his virginity before he was faced with *actually* sleeping with Nancy, having to admit it to her oh-so flushed face and swollen pink lips. Nancy smiles at him sweetly and gently brushes his bangs away from his eyes, tracing her index finger along the side of his jaw.

“I understand,” she says. “I just want to sleep with you– *actually* sleep.” Her cheeks bloom and Jonathan chuckles, their lips meeting once again in a slow, tender kiss. Jonathan rolls onto his side and Nancy sidles up next to him, pressing her back into his chest, his arms wrapped around her with his chin just skimming the top of her head. Sighing in content, Nancy snuggles into his embrace, warm and *safe* and confident that a long night’s sleep was ahead of her now that Jonathan was holding her close. Jonathan inhales the scent of strawberry shampoo still fresh in Nancy’s curls and presses his cheek against her skull, nuzzling into her as she softens in his arms, his heart pounding firmly and *proudly* in his chest – a soft, pulsating, rhythmic *thump* against Nancy’s back.

“Good night, Nancy,” Jonathan whispers, lips leaving a light kiss on the top of her head. Nancy sighs and kisses his arm in return.

“Good night, Jonathan,” she responds, and she takes steady breaths – in and out, in and out – until they’re in rhythm with Jonathan’s, their chest rising and falling in uniform, slipping into a deep, restful sleep, the first either have had in a long, long time.

*“Tell me how all this, and love too,  
will ruin us. These, our bodies,  
possessed by light. Tell me  
we’ll never get used to it.”*

- Richard Siken

*-end-*